

My performing name is Gordon Ellis. I am a country singer-songwriter in Nashville. I have one CD on the market at this time--self produced and self-promoted.

There is no way I can get songs from my cd played on any large major market stations--all that airplay is reserved for the Major Labels who can afford to give the stations thousands of dollars worth of free concert tickets, t-shirts, and cds. Radio airplay is probably the #1 way that music is promoted in this country, and the lion's share of the public never gets to hear music from independent artists because the doors at the big stations are closed.

Yet, songs from my cd have been played on several European, Australian, and New Zealand stations, as well as some small market and internet stations in the US, so somebody must like it. These DJs select their own music based on what they like--not what label it's on; however as is true for many independent artists, the large conglomerates that own many stations nationally have their doors shut to independents. This is unfair and not a level playing field.

I am also a listener and I get tired of hearing the same records and artists over and over, because that is all the stations will play--the airwaves are being bought by major labels, and the overall quality of music, at least country music--has dropped.

I have written or co-written approximately 350 songs. Have had several cuts by independent artists, and have one CD of my own recorded. Most of the airplay I have gotten has been in European countries, New Zealand, Australia, and small land and internet stations in the US. I am an unsigned artist, and would not be considered by major market stations.

I perform locally an average of once a week, but it varies quite a bit from week to week and month to month. I have a mailing list of nearly a couple of hundred people, about 2/3 of them local.

I have not recently tried to contact a local country station, as it is pretty much considered a waste of time.

I have heard songs from my cd on low power stations, though for the most part, not locally recently.

I am not aware of country stations that feature local talent.

I believe my songs are not played on local radio, because almost all air time is devoted to major label artists, or large, well funded independent labels.

I know there was a station in the area that played local talent in all genres, but I think they went under a few years ago.

I limit my comments to country, as that is what I do--I don't feel the big stations are doing the best job they can, serving the community, because they play the same artists and songs over and over.

I think that all decisions by radio stations should be made at the local level. I also think there should be regulatory forces in play to prevent any local incidents of "payola".

All local events and local music should be considered as local programming. That doesn't mean they can't program major label national artists too--they should--but there should be a balance that considers all available music.

Sponsoring charity events should not be considered local programming--it should be considered community good will.

Free CDs, t-shirts, concert tickets, wining an dining djs and program directors are all forms of payola. Allowing record labels to go through a third party, such as a "consultant" is payola. Nobody needs a consultant to determine if music is good--if the dj and his audience like it, it should be played on the show.

There should be no direct or indirect compensation from anyone to any station, programmer or dj, from indie or major labels or their reps., nor from research or programming advisors. The fact is, the cost of CDs would go down, if labels didn't spend so much money on all these things.

If an artist does a free concert, songs from that concert can be played in exchange for doing it for free, as well as songs from their cds to promote the concert in advance. That is not payola.

Record labels should be allowed to buy ad time to play clips from their artists' songs--not the whole song. Ads can be 30 seconds or one minute, like most commercials, and they should be announced as paid ads.

I heard that some stations are soliciting payment for front or back announcing, and that certainly IS "payola". I haven't heard much back announcing for many years--there is some front announcing but not for all records--I don't know if only the records paid for are front announced. Front and back announcing are a service not only to the record label and artist--it is a service to the listner and should not be bought and sold! I am not a legal scholar--I don't know if payment for record identification violates FCC identification rules--I just think it is wrong and should be prohibited.

If there are FCC rules, I don't know what they are but they are either insufficient or not being enforced

All voice tracking should be identified 4 times per hour (every 15 minutes)--then let the public make up its mind, if they are willing to listen to that. I don't think they will like it once they know, and the ratings or phone calls to the station will reflect that.

There is probably nothing inherently wrong with National Playlists that can be used as a guide to select which records to play AS LONG AS there is a reasonable percentage of airplay granted to local talent. In Canada, radio stations are obligated by law to play a minimum percentage of Canadian artists (possibly 30%--I'm not sure). That same guideline can be used to insure that local talent in each market get their share of airplay--the rest can come from the National Playlists.

Thank you for reading and addressing my concerns as a singer-songwriter and listener, about the hugely unfair playing field that has developed--I hope you can level it.

Thank you,

Gordon Ellis